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Mr. *Wigglesworth's*

D U D L E I A N
L E C T U R E.


27th March 1944

W A I T E D U E

THE FUTURE

T H E
AUTHORITY of TRADITION
considered,

A T T H E
L E C T U R E


Founded by the
Hon. *Judge* DUDLEY,

I N
HARVARD COLLEGE,

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 The Reader is desired to make the following
marginal Corrections,

Page 19. ^m 2 Tim.
20. ⁿ Ch. xx. 31.
26. ^u 2 Tim. i. 13.
30. ^s 2 Tim.
31. ^h 2 *Epist.*

46.

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The AUTHORITY of TRADITION
considered.

Matthew xv. 6.

THUS HAVE YE MADE THE COMMAND-
MENT OF GOD OF NONE EFFECT BY
YOUR TRADITION.

THE Business assigned by the honorable,
learned and pious Founder, for the third in
the quadrennial course of his Lectures, is
"to be for the detecting, and convicting and expos-
ing the idolatry of the *Romish* Church, their tyranny,
usurpations, damnable heresies, fatal errors, abominable
superstitions and other crying wickednesses in their
high places; and finally to prove that the *Church of*
Rome is that mystical *Babylon*, that man of sin, that
apostate church, spoken of in the New-Testament."

The Gentlemen who have preceded me in this
Lecture, have considered and confuted the arguments
urged by the *Romanists* in proof of the *infallibility*
of their Church,* and of the *supremacy* of the *Bishop*
of

* Dr. Wigglesworth, A. D. 1757.

of Rome.^b The charge of *idolatry*,^c which the Protestants bring against the Romanists, has been supported. The *papal* religion has been shewn to be a *complex falshood*.^d And the characters of the *man of sin*,^e as they are given by St. Paul, have been clearly evinced, to be applicable to the *Church of Rome*.

The part which I shall take in this controversy, will be to consider one of the grand sources of the fatal errors, and gross corruptions of the *Romish* church. The words of my text will naturally lead me to consider the AUTHORITY which the church of *Rome* assigns to TRADITION, and to point out some of the fatal consequences of it. They are the reply of our Saviour to the Pharisees, who found fault with his disciples for sitting down to their meals, without taking care previously to cleanse themselves from any pollutions they might have contracted. This conduct of his disciples the Pharisees charge with being a transgression of the tradition of the Elders. Our Saviour from thence takes occasion to reprehend them for the superstitious regard they paid to those traditions. He charges them with transgressing, by means of that regard, the commandment of God. In support of the charge he instances in their tradition respecting the conduct of children towards their parents. "God, saith he, has commanded by Moses, saying, honour thy father and thy mother;" and hath enforced this precept by that awful sanction, "Who-so curseth his father or mother, let him surely die." "But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his

^b Mr. Foxcroft, A. D. 1761.

^c Dr. Mayhew, A. D. 1765.

^d Dr. Mather, A. D. 1769.

^e Dr. Cooper, A. D. 1773.

his mother, that, by which thou mightest be profited by me, is a gift," devoted to some pious purpose, and neglects "to honour his father or his mother," either by not paying them that respect which is due from children to their parents, or by refusing to afford them that relief which their necessitous circumstances may require, "he shall be free" from the obligation of the divine command. In this manner the Pharisees made the commandment of God of none effect by their tradition.

To shew, that the charge which Christ brings against the Pharisees, may, with equal justice, be brought against the church of *Rome*, I shall, by divine assistance, endeavour at this time,

Faithfully to state the tenets of that church, respecting *tradition* :—— then,

Consider the force of the arguments, urged in support of those tenets:——and lastly,

Shew that the setting up *oral tradition* as of equal authority with the sacred Scriptures, has opened the door for the admission of doctrines and precepts into that church, subversive of those delivered by Christ and his Apostles.

The first thing to be done, is faithfully to state the tenets of the church of *Rome*, respecting *tradition*.—Before the Council of *Trent*, the Word of God contained in the *canonical* books of sacred Scripture, was received by the Christian Church, and acknowledged, as the *only* rule of faith and practice. All the doctrines to be believed by Christians, and all the duties

duties to be practised by them, were confessedly, either expressly contained in the holy Scriptures, or else plainly to be proved by them, by just and necessary consequence. But when the *Pope and Council of Trent* were resolved not to reform the errors and corruptions of the church, which were grown to an amazing height before the Reformation; and when they found that their doctrine of *transubstantiation*, of *purgatory*, of *seven sacraments*; and their practice of *worshipping saints, images, and relicks*, of reading the *Scriptures* and the *service of God* in an *unknown tongue*, were not to be proved by the *Scriptures*, they deemed it expedient to stretch and enlarge the rule of faith and practice beyond its ancient limits. Such absurd doctrines and superstitious practices not being warranted by the *Scriptures*, they judged it expedient to augment the Canon of *Scripture*, by the addition of several *apocryphal* books to the *Old Testament*; books never received by the *Jewish church*, to which were committed the ancient Oracles of God; because they were compositions merely human, written by uninspired persons, after the spirit of prophecy had ceased in that church. And after the rule of their faith and practice had received this addition, lest it should not yet be large enough for their purpose, they were pleased to add to it, the *unwritten word*, or *oral tradition*. This the Council of *Trent* has declared to be of *equal authority* with the sacred *Scriptures* themselves, and that it ought to be received with the *same pious reverence and affection*.[†] To justify their setting up *oral tradition* as equal in authority with the *written word* of God, the *Romanists* tell us, that the books of the New-
Testament

[†] *Pari pietatis affectu ac reverentia suscipit, ac veneratur.*

Testament were *occasionally* written, and not with a design of making them the *only* rule of faith and practice. Many things, say they, were *orally* delivered by the Apostles, which they did not commit to writing; things of equal authority, and entitled to the same respect that is due to their writings. That we may not be at a loss where to find the things *orally delivered*, but *not written*, the *Romanists* inform us, that their church, which is the *keeper*, and as occasion may require, the *publisher of them*, hath safely and infallibly conveyed them down to us by tradition. These traditions, say they, were in the church long before such occasional publications of them. They have, from age to age, been handed down, by the church, from the very Apostles themselves. And the evidence of their being apostolical, is as good as that which respects the things that the Apostles committed to writing. Besides all this, some of the *Romish* church maintain, that it appears from the *Scriptures* themselves, that we ought to submit to the testimony of the church, when she declares what things are to be received as articles of faith. We must, therefore, believe she truly dispenses the traditions received from the Apostles; even though the particulars she declares are not to be proved by Scripture. The Council of *Trent* having, in this manner, fitted a rule for their particular purpose, laid a foundation for proceeding with ease in confirming and proving whatever doctrines and practices they had a mind to establish, let them be ever so superstitious, absurd or impious.

Those who embrace the Reformation agree with the *Romanists*, that the Apostles taught the Christians

of their day several things which we do not find in their writings. Could these be ascertained, they would be equal in authority, and entitled to the same reverence and respect with the apostolic writings: But not being committed to writing, they are now lost. From the Scripture itself it is evident, that some things taught by the Apostles, were not written by them. From St. Paul's telling the *Thessalonians*,^s that "they knew what withheld the revelation of the man of sin," it is manifest that he, or some other inspired person, had made known to them what was the obstacle to his being revealed. But this is no where expressly declared in the sacred Scriptures. It would be vain to imagine this to be the only instance of apostolic instruction, not committed to writing: It is highly probable there were other instances now lost. Uncertainty is always the concomitant of those things, which have only *oral tradition* for the means of their conveyance down so long a tract of time, as from the apostolic age to the present day.

Protestants are also ready to acknowledge, that the christian writers of the first ages of the church may sometimes give light, and lead to the probable sense of some text of Scripture, which without such help would be quite obscure. From the writings of some of the Fathers it is probable, that it was the strength and greatness of the *Roman* empire, which hindered the revelation of the man of sin. The dissolution of that empire was to open a door of entrance to him, when he made his appearance in the world.

Protestants allow further, that the *general practice* of the church, where it can be accurately ascertained, is

is a good commentary on those texts which treat of the government, discipline or practice of the primitive, christian church.

But notwithstanding these concessions, *Protestants* are far from agreeing with the Council of *Trent*, which declares that the *oral* traditions of the *catholic* church, meaning the *Roman*, were to be received with equal reverence and respect, as the books of the old and new Testament ; and that he, who despiseth those traditions, is ACCURSED. On the other hand, the *Protestant* churches maintain the Scriptures of the old and new Testament to be a PERFECT RULE of *faith and practice*. They do not indeed pretend, as has been noticed already, that every thing which was said or done, by our Saviour or his Apostles, is contained in them ; or that they lay down particular rules for the management of all the prudential affairs of the christian church. With respect to our Saviour, the Evangelist *John* informs us,^a " that many other signs were done by Jesus in the presence of his disciples," which are not recorded in the Gospel. And from St. *Paul's* direction to the *Corinthians*,¹ to " let all things be done decently and in order," it is evident that some of the affairs of that church were left to be managed as their prudence should direct. In like manner, every christian church is at liberty to provide for itself, where no provision is made in the Scriptures. Care, however, must be taken that such provision be *decent* and *orderly* ; that it does not transgress any of the rules of the Gospel ; nor enjoin any thing as necessary, either to church communion, or to salvation, which is not made so by Christ, the only Legislator of the christian church. *Pro-*

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testants

^a Ch. xx. ver. 30.

¹ 1 Epist. xiv. 40.

testants only maintain that every thing necessary to salvation, whether it relates to faith or practice, is either expressly contained in the Scriptures, or may by just consequence be deduced from them. As to *oral* tradition, it is esteemed by them a way of conveyance, from an age so distant as the apostolic, too uncertain to be depended on; especially in conveying down the knowledge of such doctrinal truths, or practical precepts, as are *necessary to salvation*. And though it must be allowed that the revelations made in one age of the world have been less perfect than those made in another; the earlier revelations containing fewer articles, and being often less perspicuous than the later, yet the necessity of adding *oral tradition* cannot, from this cause, be conclusively argued. For God has in every age of the church revealed ALL that was *necessary* to be believed and practised in each particular age. And he has made his revelations with that degree of *perspicuity* which was necessary compleatly to answer all his purposes in making them. The christian dispensation, being the last which is to take place in the world, every article of faith, and every rule of duty, is either expressly contained in the sacred Scriptures of the old and new Testament, or may fairly and conclusively be deduced from them. No single person, nor any collective bodies of men, have a right to prescribe any other articles of faith or rules of duty than what are contained in those sacred writings. Every person, whose life is properly influenced and governed by the doctrines and precepts of the holy Scriptures, will obtain the mercy of God to eternal life; notwithstanding he totally disregards all those *oral traditions* which the church of *Rome* pretends she has conveyed down

down from Christ and his Apostles, with as much certainty as the sacred Scriptures have been transmitted to us.

That the *Protestant* churches have sufficient reason for abiding by their opinion, respecting the *perfection of the sacred Scriptures*, in every thing that concerns our eternal salvation; and for rejecting the *authority of oral tradition*, as it is maintained in the *Romish* church, may be fairly evinced.— For,

Oral tradition has, from experience, been found a very uncertain way of conveying the knowledge of doctrinal truths, or matters of fact, through a long succession of ages. The longevity of the *Antediluvians* gave them the greatest advantage for conveying the knowledge of the doctrines and duties of religion to posterity. Two persons might have conveyed it down from *Adam* to *Abraham*. For at the death of *Adam*, *Methuselah* was above three hundred years old. And *Methuselah* did not die, till *Shem* was almost an hundred, who lived above an hundred years after the birth of *Abraham*. Besides their longevity, the fewness of religious truths to be conveyed, gave them every advantage of doing it, with as much certainty as can attend oral tradition. But notwithstanding these advantages, a dissoluteness of manners had spread itself universally among the *Antediluvians*. And by the time of *Abraham*, the tradition of those few things, in which religion was then comprehended, was so corrupted, that God saw it necessary to correct it by making an immediate revelation to him: And that *Abraham* might not be corrupted by the *idolatry*, which was beginning to prevail

prevail in his father's family, God commanded him to forsake his kindred and his country.—Further,

The *mosaic* institution was attended with many advantages, peculiarly favourable to tradition. The law was short; and it was promulgated at Mount Sinai with solemnities, that excited the wonder and astonishment of the whole congregation of *Israel*. There were many rites and several festivals appointed to keep up the remembrance of it. All the main acts of their religion were to be performed in one place, and by persons of one family, who were devoted to this particular service. And all the males were obliged to attend the service at the temple three times a year, which kept up a constant intercourse among them. But, notwithstanding these and many other advantages in favour of tradition, that were peculiar to the *mosaic* institution, God did not see fit to leave revealed religion to the doubtfulness and uncertainty of tradition. For he commanded *Moses* to write the *whole law*, as he himself had, with his own finger, written the *ten commandments* on tables of stone.

The traditional method of conveying a revelation, must necessarily be liable to much uncertainty, arising both from involuntary mistakes, and from designed, wilful and malicious falsifications. The credit of a report which passes through many hands, depends on the *integrity* and *sufficiency* of *all the relators*. Where-ever there is a suspicion that any of them are deficient in either of these qualifications, a proportional doubt will be entertained with respect to the things reported by them. The effect of an unrecorded revelation can neither be extensive, nor permanent. It can reach but few persons; and it cannot retain

retain its full credibility, but for a short time. Was the knowledge of religious truths to be communicated orally, for many centuries together, by an innumerable multitude of persons, differing in their capacities, tempers, designs and interests, it would be morally impossible to arrive at any certainty about them.

Protestants further alledge, that the conveyance of the doctrines of Christianity by tradition, would have been attended with difficulties, peculiar to itself. The christian religion was not, like the *mosaic*, confined to one country and nation. It was early propagated into countries very remote from each other, whose inhabitants, differing in language as well as situation, maintained but little intercourse with one another. In such circumstances, had history been silent, it might reasonably have been presumed, that some persons in those distant countries would have corrupted the doctrines of Christianity. When this had taken place, the remoteness of the countries, and the different languages of the inhabitants, would have rendered it extremely difficult to have rectified such mistakes; had the knowledge of Christianity been wholly dependent on tradition. During the lives of the Apostles, a remedy might have been had in such a case. On application to some of them, the question in controversy, might have been decided. But after the decease of the Apostles, had not all the doctrines of christianity been committed to writing, whenever a controversy arose respecting any article of the christian religion, it must have remained undecided; unless it could be proved from the Scriptures that Christ had vested some one person, or some body of men, with power to decide all controversies that should arise
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in the Church, in an authoritative manner. But that he has done so, *Protestants* are not able to find sufficient evidence; notwithstanding all that the *Romanists* have offered to evince that the *Pope*, or a *General Council*, or *both*, are clothed with such authority. Indeed, the proofs of Christianity are of so complicated a nature, that, were we altogether dependent on tradition for our knowledge of them, they could not have been made out, in so clear and satisfactory a manner, as is requisite to establish articles of faith, and persuade men to embrace them.

Protestants further object, that our Saviour and his Apostles, in their controversies with the Jews, do not ever appeal to tradition, but always to the Scriptures. Our Saviour never submitted to tradition, though it was on many occasions urged against him. On the contrary, he reproached the Jews with making the commandment of God of none effect by their traditions. He told them plainly, that they worshipped God in vain, when they taught for doctrines, the commandments of men. In all his disputations with them, he invariably referred them to the Scriptures, and enjoined it on them to search the Scriptures; founding his injunction on the justness of the persuasion they entertained concerning them. * "In them, said he, ye think ye have eternal life, and they are" the very books "that testify of me." Our Saviour never once appeals to tradition, when he is justifying himself, or his doctrine, against the cavils of the Jews. — In like manner, the Apostles constantly make their appeal to the Scriptures, in all their disputes with them. They set a high character on the *Bereans* for their examining the Scriptures, and comparing with them
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* John v. 39.

the very doctrines, preached among them by the Apostles themselves. In the epistles to the *Romans*, *Galatians* and *Hebrews*, the Apostle *Paul* pursues a chain of arguments in opposition to the prejudices the Jews had imbibed against Christianity. But we do not find him, in these epistles, deducing so much as a single argument from tradition. On the contrary, the merit of the cause, contested between them, is rested wholly on evidence, derived from the Scriptures. This same Apostle, when he is enumerating to *Timothy* the advantages he derived from a religious education, mentions it as an eminent one, ¹ "that from a child he had known the HOLY SCRIPTURES, which were able to make him wise to Salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ." If the Scriptures have been handed down from the Apostles to the present time, without corruption in those articles that are necessary to salvation, either the Apostle, or the Church of *Rome*, must be miserably mistaken. The Apostle tells *Timothy*, they are able to make him *wise to salvation*. The Church of *Rome* says they are *not so*, without the help of those *traditional articles*, which she has been so happy as to convey down to us with infallible certainty. Which is entitled to the greatest credit, the Apostle or the Church of *Rome*, will scarcely be called in question by any who have not learned the art of believing that an Apostle, writing under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, can commit an egregious blunder.—When the apostle *Peter* knew that his death was approaching, he wrote his second epistle for this very end, that his christian brethren "might have these things," namely, the doctrines and precepts taught by him and the other Apostles, "always in remembrance." But why need he have
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¹ 1 Epist. iii. 15.

been so solicitous to commit those things to writing? Perhaps he never heard, that the Church of *Rome* was so highly privileged as to be the keeper and conveyancer of those instructions which the Apostles, either through hurry of business, or through carelessness, had neglected to commit to writing. But to be serious, neither our Saviour, nor his Apostles, give the least hint of their having left any "unwritten word," with the Church, to be by her conveyed down to succeeding ages by *oral tradition*: Much less have they given the least intimation of their having left any articles *necessary to salvation*, to be in this manner conveyed down by the Church.

Were these the only reasons for rejecting the traditions of the Church of *Rome*, *Protestants* would esteem themselves fully justified in totally disregarding them.—But this brings me to observe,

That the very supposal of a necessity of adding *oral tradition* to scripture revelation, implies some *imperfection* in the Scriptures. On this supposition the Scriptures must, either *not contain* all things necessary to be believed and practised, in order to obtain salvation, or else *not deliver* the articles of faith and practice with that degree of *perspicuity*, which was necessary compleatly to answer all the divine purposes in delivering them. Both of these have been openly taught and avowed by the *Romanists*, even in a Protestant country, while they have been attempting to make proselytes to their Church. In a pamphlet dispersed in England in the former part of the present century, it is asked, "*Why should not the Scripture ALONE be the rule of faith?*" To which the answer given is, "*Because several NECESSARY ARTICLES*
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are either NOT AT ALL CONTAINED in Scripture, or at least are NOT PLAIN in the Scripture without the help of tradition." But these are positions, which Protestants think ought not to be laid down, in order to establish the authority of oral tradition.—For,

It may be clearly evinced, that every article of faith and practice, necessary to salvation, is contained in the Scriptures; even from a concession of the Church of Rome itself. For that Church allows, "that the Scriptures are to be received by all christians as the INFALLIBLE word of GOD." Now this infallible word declares, "that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to all good works." If by the man of God is to be understood a *Pastor* or *Teacher* in the christian Church, then the Scripture is given to *perfect* him for his office; and *thoroughly* to furnish him to all good works, belonging to his station. Or, should the man of God be supposed to refer to a *private christian*, then the design of the Scripture is to make him perfect, and thoroughly to furnish him to all good works; compleatly qualifying him for the faithful discharge of all the duties of his christian profession. On either supposition it will follow, that all necessary articles of faith and practice are contained in the Scriptures. For they are profitable for *doctrine*, teaching us to form just thoughts of the divine Majesty and of ourselves. They also teach us the way in which sinful man may become reconciled to God. They are profitable for *reproof*, for all the errors and false doctrines which have at any time been propagated, may

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be confuted by them. They are profitable for *correction*, for they lay the strictest prohibition on every kind of wickedness and on every degree of immorality. By convincing men of their sins and their faults, they become the means of correcting them. They are profitable for *instruction* in *righteousness*, teaching all the rules of righteousness, even all the duties incumbent on christians. The Scriptures are so perfect for all these ends, as fully to answer the design of God in giving them; which was, that *the man of God*, whether he be a teacher in the church, or only a private christian, may *be made perfect, & thoroughly furnished to all good works*. Now, should it be admitted, that the Scriptures do not contain every article of faith and practice, necessary to salvation, it will follow, either that the man of God may be *perfect* without the knowledge of some *necessary* articles of christianity; or else, that God did not know what would be sufficient to make him *perfect*. The former is a self-evident contradiction. To suppose the latter of Him, whose understanding is infinite, would be as foolish as it is blasphemous.

Indeed from the whole current of the Scriptures we are led to conclude, that all the necessary articles of faith and practice are contained in them. The Apostle John informs us, in the close of his gospel,^a that "these things were written, that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing *we might have life* through his name." So again in his first epistle^b he says, "these things have I written unto you—that ye might know that ye have eternal life." Now, since the design of the Scriptures is to make known the way to eternal life; and since from them we may be

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^a Ch. xx. 30.

^b Ch. v. 13.

certain that we are entitled to it, it is evident that they must contain all the articles necessary to salvation. There can be no occasion for the help of *oral tradition*, to add any thing to *their perfection*.

Should any thing then be taught by a minister of the gospel, or decreed by a particular church, as necessary to salvation, which is not to be found in express words in the Scriptures, nor to be deduced from them by just consequence, it may safely be rejected; it cannot be an article of our holy religion. All such additions are mere perversions of the gospel of Christ. The gospel was so fully preached by the Apostles themselves, that St. Paul scruples not to denounce a most solemn curse against either an *Apostle*, or an *Angel from Heaven*, who should presume to preach a gospel different from that which had been preached by him. ^p “ Though we, says he, or an *Angel from Heaven*, preach any other gospel, than that which we have preached unto you, *let him be ACCURSED.*” To impress this the more, on the minds of the *Galatians* in the first place, and then on the minds of all who should read this epistle, it is immediately repeated, ^q “ As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you, than that which ye have received, *let him be ACCURSED.*” Surely then those of the *Romish* communion, who declare there are several *necessary* things, *not* contained in the Scriptures, have reason to fear lest this apostolic curse should come upon them. Till they can prove that such *additional articles* were *orally* delivered by the Apostles themselves; that they stand on as good evidence, as those articles do, which the Apostles committed to writing; and that

^p Gal. i. 8.

^q verse 9.

that the church has handed them down from the Apostles, pure and free from corruption, *Protestants* will esteem themselves fully justified in rejecting them.

Should the *Romanists*, to free themselves from the charge of inconsistency and self-contradiction, reply, "That the church of *Rome* allows the sufficiency of Scripture to *perfect* the man of God, provided Scripture be interpreted as the *catholic*, meaning the *Roman* church, directs; and that there be also a holding fast *those traditions*, to which the *written word refers*," it will not answer their purpose. This written word declares, that *as written* it is profitable for all the afore-mentioned purposes. The *Romanists* affirm there are *other articles*, not contained in it, preserved by the church and handed down by tradition, which are *equally necessary* to those ends. Now to assert, that the *written word* of God is infallibly true, which declares that the Scriptures are able to make men *wise to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ*, and to make the man of God *perfect*; and at the same time to assert, that they are *not able*, without the addition of some *other NECESSARY articles*, carries so much the appearance of absurdity and self-contradiction, that it will require no small share of the art and subtilty of a *Jesuit* to free such assertions from it.

To palliate this inconsistency, the *Romanists* plead, 'that the Scriptures themselves refer to *traditions*, which are to be held fast, as well as the things that are written.' To this purpose they quote a passage from the second epistle to the *Thessalonians*: "Therefore,

fore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the *traditions* which ye have been taught, whether by *word*, or our *epistle*." Upon this passage one of their writers makes this observation. "Hence it is clear, that *some traditions* were delivered to the *Thessalonians* by *word of mouth*, and those of *EQUAL authority* with what was *written*, if not more; for the Holy Ghost doth name them *first*, as they were indeed the first in being." † And Bellarmine saith, "that the Apostle commands that they *no less* observe what they had received *WITHOUT writing*, than what they had received by *epistle*." To justify their interpretation of this text, and to shew its pertinency to the point for which it is alledged, it is incumbent on the *Romanists* to make it evident, that the *traditions* which the *Thessalonians* were taught by *word*, were different from those taught by *epistle*; and that those *verbal traditions* were never committed to *writing*, by persons under the guidance of the holy Spirit; but left with the church to be carefully preserved and delivered down *orally* to succeeding ages, as circumstances may require. To set the matter in a just point of light, it may be observed, that whatever *traditions necessary to salvation* the Apostle delivered to the *Thessalonians* by *EPISTLE*, the same he had before delivered to them by *word of mouth*. Bellarmine himself is constrained to acknowledge, "that without doubt the Apostle had *fully preached the whole gospel* to them." The traditions, then, referred to in the text, were such as the *Thessalonians* had been taught *before*, by the same Spirit and by the same person, who indited this epistle. Whereas the *Romanists* refer to *traditions* of which no traces can be found for *several hundred years* after the whole canon of Scripture

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† Touchstone of the reformed Gospel.

was compleated. Now it is readily granted, that where the things *spoken* are the same with those afterwards *written*, they are of equal authority. For the authority of divine truths is not at all affected by the manner in which the knowledge of them is communicated. The Apostle, however, by joining *word* and *letter* together, does not design to insinuate that the things taught them by *letter* were *different* from what he had before taught them by *word of mouth*. For in the 5th verse of this very chapter, wherein he charges them to hold fast the *traditions* they had been taught, he expressly asserts that what he was then actually writing, he had told them before. "Remember ye not, says he, that when I was yet with you, I told you these things." Whereas the *Romanists* bring this text to support the authority of such traditions as enjoin things not commanded in Scripture, or else such as alter the plain sense of it, and even such as expressly contradict it.

Should it be admitted that the passage under consideration refers to traditions, which at that time were not committed to writing; yet it will not serve the purpose, for which the *Romanists* alledge it. For, at the time the Apostle gave this injunction to the *Thessalonians*, there was but a small part of the New-Testament committed to writing. Probably the epistle to the church of *Antioch*, recorded Acts xv. the two epistles to the *Thessalonians*, and the gospels of *Matthew* and *Mark*, were the only books of the New-Testament extant at that time. Now, it will not, surely, follow because, when things were in such a situation, the Apostle commanded the *Thessalonians* to hold fast what they had been taught by *word*,
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that other things, necessary to salvation, were left *unwritten*, to be handed down by *oral tradition*, after the canon of Scripture was compleat.

Should the modern *Romanist* reply with Cardinal *Perron*, "We must not answer that *St Paul* speaks here *only* of such traditions, which, though not in his epistle to the *Thessalonians*, yet were *afterwards written*, and in other books of Scripture; because it is upon occasion of tradition touching the *cause of the hindrance of the coming of Antichrist*, which was NEVER WRITTEN, that this injunction is laid down;" should the *Romanist* make this reply, the *Protestant* is ready to rejoin, that if the tradition there referred to, which the *Thessalonians* had such a solemn charge to hold fast, be yet LOST, because it was not committed to writing, we can have little or no reason to pay any regard to other oral traditions, which are no ways concerned in the apostolic injunction. This very plea of the Cardinal furnishes us with a good reason why the church of *Rome* or even the *catholic Church*, should not be esteemed a sure preserver of oral traditions. It is, indeed, a conclusive argument against all pretensions of that kind. This text, then, can never be admitted by *Protestants* as evidence sufficient to convince them, that "the traditions of the *Romish Church* are to be received with equal piety and reverence as the books of the old and new Testament."

In like manner the other texts urged by the *Romanists* in favour of the traditions of their Church, are far from proving that any obligation lays on christians to pay the least regard to them. These texts relate *only* to the things delivered by the *Apostles themselves*; and have no concern with the traditions

of *after-ages*. The bare reading them is sufficient to confute the *Popish* interpretation of them. St. Paul says to the *Corinthians*, " I praise you, brethren, that you remember *me* in all things, and keep the ordinances [or traditions] as *I* delivered them unto you." According to the *Romanists*, instead of remembering the *Apostle*, we must remember and reverence the *authority* of the *church*; and instead of keeping the traditions which the *Apostle* delivered, who on another occasion tells them, that what he delivered to them, he received of the Lord, we must keep those traditions which the *Church* delivers. — Again, St. Paul says, " We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the *tradition* which *he* received of us." This us the *Romanists* apply to *their Church*, and urge this text in proof that Christians ought to receive *their traditions*; such as were delivered to them; not indeed by the *Apostles*, but by *Councils* and *Popes* several hundred years after the canon of Scripture was settled. — The same *Apostle* charges *Timothy* to " hold fast the *form of sound words* which thou hast been taught of *me*, in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus." By the *form of sound words* the *Romanists* understand all the *traditionary articles* of faith in their Church, though they are not to be found in the *Apostle's* writings. And instead of holding them in *faith* and *love*, they are to be held *without love or mercy* to all such as differ from them. — Once more, the *Apostle* directs *Timothy*, saying, " The things which thou hast heard of *me* among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." These things the

Romanists

* 1 Epist. xi. 2. † 2 Thess. iii. 6. ‡ 2 Tim. i. 23. * 2 Tim. ii. 2.

Romanists pretend were committed to *them ONLY*. If so, either *Timothy*, or the persons to whom he committed the things which he heard of the Apostle, were miserably mistaken in making choice of those of the *Romish* church, as *faithful men*, fit to be entrusted with the things taught by the Apostle. For the *Romish* clergy have abundantly proved themselves quite unfaithful to the trust reposed in them. They have done so, by with-holding what is truly *apostolical*; and by delivering for *apostolical*, things that are most directly *opposite* to the Scriptures.

Till the *Romanists* are able to produce some better evidence than any that has yet been offered by them, *Protestants* will find it hard to persuade themselves, that *several articles necessary to salvation* are NOT AT ALL CONTAINED IN THE SCRIPTURES: Much less will they be convinced by the evidence adduced by them, that the traditions of the church of *Rome* merit equal reverence with the sacred Scriptures.

The other reason assigned by the *Romanists*, "Why the Scripture *alone* ought not to be the rule of faith," is, "because several *necessary articles* are NOT PLAIN in the Scripture without the *help of tradition*." In proof of this, they alledge the authority of *St. Peter*, who hath assured us, "there are some things in *St. Paul's* epistles *hard to be understood*, which they that are unlearned and unstable *wrest*, as they do also the other Scriptures, to *their own destruction*." From this text the *Romanists* conclude, that the *unlearned* part of mankind are in more danger of being hurt by having the Scriptures to read, than by being denied the use of them. Such stress has been laid upon it by some of their writers, that on the authority of this passage *alone*, they have determined "the Scrip-
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tures not to be sufficiently clear in all points wherein our salvation is concerned; but that the misunderstanding and misinterpreting them, may endanger our eternal salvation."

On the other hand, Protestants allow that an equal degree of *perspicuity* does not attend all parts of the sacred Scriptures; that they contain some things of a very *abstruse* nature, which after all our care and pains, we shall not be able fully to comprehend. They do not, indeed, maintain that the articles necessary to salvation are treated with an equal degree of plainness in every place, where they are mentioned. For it sufficiently answers all the purposes of religion, if those things which are handled but *obscurely* in some places, are treated of with *perspicuity* in others. Neither do they pretend, but that persons of corrupt and vicious dispositions, who study the Scriptures under such a bias, though they do it with considerable attention, may fall into some fundamental errors or mistakes. Neither do they affirm, that the things necessary to salvation, are delivered in so plain a manner, as to be understood without using such helps as are necessary to understand other books and things of equal antiquity.—But Protestants do, indeed, maintain that every article of faith and practice, necessary to salvation, is delivered in so *clear* and *intelligible* a manner in the sacred Scriptures, that every person who studies them with a firm resolution to yield his assent to every doctrine, plainly revealed in them, and to practise all the duties they enjoin, will be preserved from every fatal error, and led into the knowledge of all necessary truth: Provided he uses all the helps which God in his providence affords him, and joins his fervent and persevering prayer to God for a blessing on his endeavours.

Protestants

Protestants are fully persuaded they do not ascribe this degree of *perspicuity* to the sacred Scriptures without sufficient reason. For the moral precepts of Christianity contain every thing of the kind to be found in the writings of the Heathen, without any of the imperfections that attended them; and they are delivered with so much plainness as to exclude all doubt, respecting the duties incumbent on us. Those doctrines of Christianity, which we are able fully to comprehend, are consonant to our natural notions of the Deity; and those which are too sublime to be fully comprehended, appear, as far as we are able to apprehend them, worthy of God to reveal. Both one and the other have a direct tendency to inculcate holiness; and by that means to qualify mankind for the enjoyment of everlasting felicity. If the articles of faith and practice, necessary to salvation, are not *clearly* and *intelligibly* revealed in the sacred Scriptures, mankind have yet to learn the way to everlasting life.

Protestants are also fully persuaded, that the *perspicuity* of the Scriptures in all necessary articles, may be fairly argued, from the *design of God in making a revelation of his will*. From a passage already cited it appears, that the express design of God in giving the holy Scriptures by divine revelation, was "that the man of God may be *perfect*, thoroughly furnished to all good works." Now should it be granted that the Scriptures, considered as a rule of faith and practice, are *absolutely perfect*; yet if this rule be delivered in such dark and intricate terms, as to be unintelligible to the very persons, for whose use it was designed, it certainly can be *no rule to them*. On such a supposition, neither their faith, nor their practice, could be regulated by it. It cannot be imagined that

that God, who is not only our *Master*, but our *kind and compassionate Father*, should give us a rule of conduct, incapable of being comprehended. To ascribe such a conduct to him, would be to suppose him, either incapable of revealing the things that concern our salvation in an intelligible manner; or else, mistaken in thinking he had revealed them with sufficient clearness, when he had done it in a manner above our comprehension. The former supposition would be a direct impeachment of the power of God, and the latter of his wisdom.

Protestants further argue the *perspicuity* of the Scriptures from the *testimony of the Scriptures concerning themselves*. To this purpose are the words of *Moses* to the *Israelites*. ^a "I his commandmen", says he, which I command thee this day, is *not hidden* from thee, neither is it far off. But the word is very nigh thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayst do it." The royal Psalmist assures us, ^b that "the statutes of the Lord are *right*; the commandment of the Lord is *pure, enlightening the eyes*; ^c that the word of God was a *lamp* to his feet, and a *light* to his path; ^d and that through meditating on the divine law, he had more understanding than all his *teachers*." The apostle *Peter* ^e enjoins it on us to "give heed to the word of prophecy, as to a *light shining* in a dark place, till the day dawn and the day-star arise in our heart." The evangelist *John* tells us, ^f that "his gospel was written that we might *believe* that Jesus was the Christ; and that believing, we might *have life* through his name." And the Apostle *Paul* affirms, ^g that "the holy Scriptures are able to make us *wise* unto salvation." Now unless the Scriptures are *clear enough*

^a Deut. xxx. 11, 14.

^b Ps. xix. 8.

^c Ps. cxix. 105.

^d v. 99.

^e 2 Epist. i. 19.

^f Ch. xx. 31.

^g 1 Tim. iii. 15.

enough to be understood, we cannot be the *wiser* for them; and unless they are so, in all *necessary* points, they cannot make us wise unto salvation.

From these evidences of the *perspicuity* of sacred Scriptures, the presumption is strong that the *Romanists* make a false inference from the words of St. Peter, who says ^b that "in the epistles of Paul there are some things *hard to be understood*, which the unlearned and unstable *wrest*, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction;" when they conclude from them, that the Scriptures are *not sufficiently clear* in all points, wherein our salvation is concerned; but that "the misunderstanding and misinterpreting them, may endanger our eternal salvation." And that they have actually made a false inference, will appear from an attentive consideration of the passage itself. For,

The very thing which the *Romanists* bring this text to *disprove*, is evidently implied in the words of the Apostle. It is only *some things* in the epistles of Paul and in the other Scriptures, that are *hard to be understood*. The *other things*, therefore, are *clear and intelligible*. There is no danger of misunderstanding them; provided they are studied with care and attention, together with a fixed determination to *do*, as well as to *know the will of God*. There is not the least occasion of keeping the Scriptures from the common people; for the Apostle allowed the free use of them to the *unlearned*, otherwise they could not have *wrested* them.
—Further,

Those who are called *unlearned* and *unstable* by the Apostle, were not such as are called so by the *Romanists* in this controversy. They were not such persons as, in modern times, are esteemed *unlearned*;
namely,

^b 2 Tim. iii. 16;

namely, persons unacquainted with the liberal arts and sciences: But they were such as had not learned the *fundamental points of religion*, and were unsettled in the *principles of Christianity*. They were persons of the same character with those whom St. Paul compares¹ to “children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.” Such unstable persons may easily be supposed capable of *misunderstanding*, and even of *wresting* the Scriptures to *their own destruction*; notwithstanding that every article, necessary to salvation, is delivered with all needful plainness. To apply the words, therefore, to the *illiterate part of mankind in general*, and not to those who are unlearned and unsettled in the principles of Christianity, is a shameful perversion of them.

It is worthy of notice, that the Apostle does not forbid these very men the *use of the Scriptures*, or even the reading the things *hard to be understood*. Their destruction was not owing to their reading them, but was wholly occasioned by their *wresting* and *abusing* them. Now, since the Apostle does not order the Scriptures to be kept from persons, who so grossly abused them, we may safely conclude that he never intended they should be kept from the *common people in general*; merely because some persons in every age might probably abuse them, as the *unstable* then did. The true inference to be drawn from this text is directly contrary to the conclusion of the *Romanists*. Instead of denying the common people the free use of the Scriptures, they ought rather to be exhorted to study them with the greater care, diligence and humility; lest they should be left to pervert them to their own destruction, as the unlearned and unstable did in the days of the Apostle.

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¹ Eph. iv. 14.

It may be observed further, that the things which the Apostle says are *hard to be understood*, and which were *wrested* by some to their destruction, are things, of which Christians may in some measure be ignorant, without *endangering* their salvation. They are not, as the *Romanists* maintain, things *necessary to salvation*, which are spoken of, either with respect to *Paul's* epistles, or to the other Scriptures. *Peter* had been treating, in the context, of the *new heavens* and the *new earth*, and of the *dissolution of the world* at the second visible coming of Christ. Concerning these subjects, which are also treated of in the other Scriptures, there are several things confessedly *hard to be understood*. But then, it is not necessary, that the humble, believing Christian should fully understand them, in order to his being saved at Christ's second appearance. A general expectation of those things, where there cannot be a full comprehension of them, will so influence the heart and life of a pious Christian, that he will be found of his Judge in peace.

Further, there being some things in the Scriptures *hard to be understood*, ought not to be made an objection against their perspicuity and utility. Some subjects, in their own nature, are more difficult than others; and require more study and attention to understand them. Notwithstanding such subjects are handled with justness and propriety, and with as much perspicuity as they will admit, yet to hasty and inconsiderate persons there may be some things concerning them, hard to be understood. This is frequently the case with the most judicious and accurate compositions. But then it must be remembered, that the oftener and the more carefully such compositions are read, the better will they be understood, and the

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more will they be admired. And this is a glory that does, by way of eminence, belong to the sacred Scriptures.

It is also worthy our observation, that the difficult passages of Scripture which have been abused by some, have had a very good effect on others, even in the lower classes of life. By endeavouring to attain a competent knowledge of such passages, they have been led into a more thorough acquaintance with the Scriptures in general; and have had their lives suitably influenced by the important truths contained in them. Since these have been the happy effects of studying the *abstruse* parts of Scripture, we may safely abide by the *Protestant* doctrine, that THE SCRIPTURES ARE SUFFICIENTLY CLEAR AND PERSPICUOUS IN ALL POINTS THAT IMMEDIATELY CONCERN OUR ETERNAL SALVATION.

Were the tenets of the Church of *Rome*, respecting tradition, merely the private sentiments of some speculative men in that church, they would not have deserved the notice we have taken of them. But when they are considered as the chief supports of that amazing fabrick of worldly policy, which the Pope and his clergy have reared upon the foundation of Christ and the Apostles, they cannot undergo too strict an examination. *Tradition*, or *traditive* interpretations of Scripture, lie as the foundation of all the distinguishing tenets of *Papery*. The Church of *Rome*, finding that, in many instances, she failed of plain scriptural evidence to prove her avowed articles of faith, and to justify the practices she had adopted, has discovered her worldly wisdom, by declaring *tradition* to be of equal authority with the Scriptures. However, by doing so, she has admitted to her bosom,

bosom, doctrines and precepts, subversive of those inculcated by Christ and his Apostles. By means of her traditions, she has made the commandment of God of none effect.

In the bull of *Pope Pius IV.* bearing date at *Rome*, A. D. 1564, printed with the acts of the Council of *Trent*, a FORM OF FAITH is drawn up, which was extracted from the decrees of that Council. This form of faith, every one, who enters into holy orders, is bound by solemn oath not only to believe, but to maintain and defend, and teach the people under his charge; and that under pain of the displeasure of Almighty God, and his holy Apostles *Peter and Paul*. This *creed* is the standard of modern *Popery*, and the last twelve articles of it contain the distinguishing tenets of the *Romish Church*. These I shall now rehearse: For the rehearsal of them, without any commentary, will be sufficient to justify the charge we bring against that church, of making the commandments of God of none effect by her traditions. The articles are as follows.

“ Article XIII. I most firmly admit and embrace apostolical and ecclesiastical traditions, and all other observations and constitutions of the same church.

XIV. I do admit the holy Scriptures in the same sense that holy mother-church doth, whose business it is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of them; and I will interpret them according to the unanimous consent of the fathers.

XV. I do profess and believe that there are seven sacraments of the new law truly and properly so called, instituted by Jesus Christ our Lord, and necessary to the salvation of mankind, though not all of them to every one, *viz.* Baptism, Confirmation,

Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Orders, Marriage; and that they do confer grace; and that of these, Baptism, Confirmation and Orders, may not be repeated without sacrilege. I do also receive and admit the received and approved rites of the catholic church in her solemn administration of the abovesaid sacraments.

XVI. I do embrace and receive all and every thing that hath been defined and declared by the holy Council of *Trent* concerning original sin and justification.

XVII. I do also profess, that in the Mass there is offered unto God a true, proper, and propitiatory sacrifice for the quick and the dead, and that in the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist there is truly, really, and substantially the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ; and that there is a conversion made of the whole substance of the bread into the body, and of the whole substance of the wine into the blood; which conversion the catholic church calls TRANSUBSTANTIATION.

XVIII. I confess that under one kind only, whole and entire Christ, and a true sacrament, is taken and received.

XIX. I do firmly believe that there is a *Purgatory*, and that the souls, kept prisoners there, do receive help by the suffrages of the faithful.

XX. I do likewise believe, that the Saints reigning together with Christ, are to be worshipped and prayed unto; and that they do offer prayers unto God for us; and that their reliques are to be had in veneration.

XXI. I do most firmly assert, that the Images of Christ, of the blessed Virgin, the Mother of God; and of other Saints, ought to be had and retained; and that due honour and veneration ought to be given to them.

XXII.

XXII. I do affirm, that the power of Indulgences was left by Christ in the Church; and that the use of them is very beneficial to christian people.

XXIII. I do acknowledge the holy, catholic, and apostolic *Roman* Church, to be the Mother and Mistress of all Churches; and I do promise and swear true obedience to the Bishop of *Rome*, the successor of *St. Peter*, the Prince of the Apostles, and Vicar of Jesus Christ.

XXIV. I do undoubtedly receive and profess *all other things*, which have been delivered, defined and declared by the sacred Canons and œcumenical Councils, and especially by the holy Synod of *Trent*; and all things contrary thereunto, and all heresies condemned, rejected and anathematized by the Church, I do likewise condemn, reject and anathematise."

Including these articles, there are above 100 points of doctrine laid down by the Council of *Trent*, of which no traces can be found in the Scriptures. To be consistent with itself, the Council hath denounced an *anathema* upon all such as do not believe them. To point out the repugnancy of the aforementioned articles to the sacred Scriptures, would exceed the limits assigned to this discourse. It must, therefore, be left for the employment of some future lecturers.

The present discourse cannot be closed better, than by reciting a memorable passage from *Chillingworth's* proof that *Protestants are no hereticks*. *Chillingworth*, who had been converted from *Popery* by studying THE SCRIPTURES, addressing himself to a writer of the *Roman* Church, does, in this summary manner, plead the Protestant cause.

"Know then, Sir, that when I say the religion of *Protestants* is in prudence to be preferred before yours;

as on the one side I do not understand by your religion the doctrine of *Bellarmino* or *Baronius*, or any other private man amongst you, nor the doctrine of the *Sorbonne* or of the *Jesuits*, or of the *Dominicans*, or of any other particular company among you ; but that wherein you all agree, or profess to agree, *the doctrine of the Council of Trent* : So accordingly on the other side, by the religion of *Protestants*, I do not understand the doctrine of *Luther*, or *Calvin*, or *Melancton*, nor the confession of *Augusta*, or *Geneva*, nor the *Catechism of Heidelberg*, nor the articles of the *Church of England*, no, nor the harmony of Protestant confessions ; but that wherein they all agree, and which they all subscribe with greater harmony, as a *perfect rule* of their faith and actions, that is the BIBLE.

“ The BIBLE, I say, the BIBLE *only*, is the religion of Protestants, whatsoever else they believe besides it : And the plain, irrefragable, and indisputable *consequences* of it, well may they hold as matter of *opinion* ; but as matter of faith and religion, neither can they with coherence to their own grounds believe it themselves, nor require the belief of it of others, without most high and schismatical presumption. I for my part, after a long, and (as I verily believe and hope) impartial search of the *true way to eternal happiness*, do profess plainly that I cannot find any rest for the sole of my foot, but upon this rock only.

“ I plainly see, and with mine own eyes, that there are Popes against Popes, Councils against Councils, some Fathers against others, the same Fathers against themselves, a consent of Fathers of one age against a consent of Fathers of another age, the Church of one age against the Church of another age : Traditive interpretations of Scripture are pretended, but there
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are few, or none to be found : No tradition but only of the Scripture, can derive itself from the fountain, but may be plainly proved to be brought in, in such an age after Christ, or that such an age it was not in. In a word, there is no sufficient *certainty* but of *SCRIPTURE only*, for any considering man to build upon. *This* therefore, and *this only*, I have reason to believe : *This* I will profess, according to *this* I will live, and for *this*, if there be occasion, I will not only willingly, but even gladly, lose my life, though I should be sorry that Christians should take it from me.

“ Propose me any thing out of this book, and require whether I believe it or no, and seem it never so incomprehensible to human reason, I will subscribe it with hand and heart, as knowing no demonstration can be stronger than this, *GOD HATH SAID SO, THEREFORE IT IS TRUE.* In other things, I will take no man’s liberty of judging from him; neither shall any man take mine from me. I will think no man the worse *man*, nor the worse *christian*, I will love no man *the less*, for differing in opinion from me. And what measure I mete to others, I expect from them again. I am fully assured that God *does* not, and therefore men *ought* not to require any more of any man than this, *to believe the Scripture to be God’s word, to endeavour to find out the true sense of it, and to live according to it.*”

That all, who receive their education in this place, may do so, God of his infinite mercy grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



